

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 /026 W

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O R 150945Z SEP 75

FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4578

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

USMISSION GENEVA

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 3592

EXDIS

GENEVA FOR DEPASSTSEC SAUNDERS, MEPC DEL

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, SY, IS, US, EG

SUBJECT: ASAD-DE BORCHGRAVE SEPT 13 INTERVIEW - OFF RECORD REMARKS

REF: DAMASCUS 3589

1. ASAD'S OFF-THE-RECORD COMMENTS WERE PROVIDED ME ON
CONFIDENTIAL BASIS BY DE BORCHGRAVE.

2. POSSIBLE SOVIET INTERVENTION:

MOST SIGNIFICANT OFF-THE-RECORD REMARK WAS MADE BY
PRESIDENT DURING LATTER HALF OF INTERVIEW WHERE HE CAUTIONED
NO ONE SHOULD OVERLOOK POSSIBILITY SYRIA MAY CONCLUDE TIME
IS PROPITIOUS FOR RESUMPTION OF HOSTILITIES TO LIBERATE ITS
LAND. DE BORCHGRAVE INTERJECTED AT THAT POINT, "BUT WHAT
CAN YOU REALLY DO?" ASAD REPLIED, "EXACTLY WHAT WE DID WITH
EGYPT ON OCTOBER 6 BUT WE CAN DO IT ALONE. THIS WILL PRODUCE
A MAJOR INTERNATIONAL CRISIS AND AN OIL EMBARGO." DE
BORCHGRAVE THEN QUERIED "BUT WHAT HAPPENS IF SYRIA IS
THREATENED WITH TOTAL DEFEAT FROM ISRAEL?" PRESIDENT
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REPLIED, "YOU DON'T THINK OUR SOVIET FRIENDS WOULD ALLOW

THIS TO HAPPEN, DO YOU?" DE BORCHGRAVE ASKED, "YOU MEAN SOVIET TROOPS WOULD COME IN TO FIGHT ISRAEL?" PRESIDENT SAID, "SOVIET TROOPS MIGHT COME IN AS A FIRST STAGE. THEN I THINK THE US WOULD UNDERSTAND WHAT IT HAD TO DO."

3. DE BORCHGRAVE SAID THAT HIS FINAL QUESTION ABOUT SOVIET ATTITUDE TOWARDS SINAI ACCORD, QUOTING KISSINGER AS SAYING HE ANTICIPATED "NO OPPOSITION," STARTLED THE PRESIDENT. DE BORCHGRAVE COMMENTED ASAD HAD CLEARLY NOT BEEN BRIEFED, ASKED WHEN SECRETARY HAD MADE COMMENT, THEN AFTER LONG PAUSE ANSWERED ON RECORD AS REPORTED REFTEL.

4. SAUDI ATTITUDE TOWARDS SINAI ACCORD:

DE BORCHGRAVE OBSERVED THAT IF SINAI ACCORD WAS "SO BAD" HOW DID PRESIDENT EXPLAIN THAT EGYPT, THE MOST POPULOUS COUNTRY, AND SAUDI ARABIA, THE RICHEST, HAD APPROVED IT. ASAD REPLIED, "SAUDI ARABIA DID NOT APPROVE THE ACCORD. PRINCE SAUD SAID CERTAIN THINGS PUBLICLY TO PLEASE DR. KISSINGER, FOR REASONS YOU CAN IMAGINE. HIS COMMENTS WERE NOT AN ACCURATE REFLECTION OF THE SAUDI POSITION. WE HAVE BEEN IN TOUCH WITH THEM."

5. JOINT SYRO-JORDANIAN MILITARY COMMAND:

ASKED IF RECENT FLURRY OF ACTIVITY BETWEEN DAMASCUS AND JORDAN WAS LEADING TOWARDS A JOINT MILITARY COMMAND, ASAD REPLIED "WE ARE VERY SATISFIED WITH WHAT WE HAVE DONE. WE SEE NO REASON TO GO BEYOND IT."

6. PLO SENSITIVITIES:

IN CORRECTING ORIGINAL TEXT ON SEPTEMBER 14, ASAD TOLD DE BORCHGRAVE THROUGH PRESS SECRETARY THAT HE HAD TO BE PARTICULARLY CAREFUL AT THIS JUNCTURE ABOUT PLO FEELINGS. THIS WAS WHY HE AMENDED HIS ANSWER TO DE BORCHGRAVE'S QUESTION ABOUT WHAT WOULD CONSTITUTE A MORE EFFECTIVE DEFENSIVE LINE FOR SYRIA. AS NOTED REFTEL, PRESIDENT ALTERED ORIGINAL PHRASE "WHEN TWO COUNTRIES ARE AT PEACE" AND DELETED FINAL PHRASE SAME ANSWER "FROM WHICH TO DEFEND EASTERN GALILEE." BOTH COMMENTS, HE OBSERVED, WOULD HAVE BEEN OFFENSIVE TO PLO.

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7. IRAQ:

DE BORCHGRAVE SPECULATED THAT HE SUPPOSED RECENT EVENTS MIGHT PUSH SYRIA AND IRAQ CLOSER TOGETHER. PRESIDENT REPLIED WITHOUT ELABORATION, "OUR RANKS ARE ALREADY CLOSED."
MURPHY

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